

THE LAST LOT

A Work in Progress

May 2015

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“Beauty is our weapon against nature;
by it we make objects, giving them limit, symmetry, proportion.
Beauty halts and freezes the melting flux of nature.
All objects are alive, they have voices,
they speak of their history and interrelatedness.
And they are all talking at once!”

Camille Paglia

“Works of art, in my opinion, are the only objects in the material universe
to possess internal order, and that is why I believe in art for art's sake.”

E. M. Forster

“There is no need for me to keep a skull on my desk,
to stand with one foot on the ruins of Rome,
or wear a locket with the sliver of a saint's bone.
It is enough to realize that every common object
in this sunny little room will outlive me --
the carpet, radio, bookstand and rocker.
Not one of these things will attend my burial,
not even this dented goosenecked lamp
with its steady benediction of light.”

Billy Collins

CHARACTERS:

(an ensemble of six actors: two men and four women)

DOCTOR TUCKER DANES, an auctioneer and former physician; mid-fifties

COSMINA VALLHUND, bidder #15, a Romanian-American tattooist; early twenties

SONIA BORZOIAN, bidder #24, a Romanian museum curator; late twenties

ROZANA KOMODORESCU, bidder #37, a Romanian-American; late twenties

MONIQUE MALINOIS, bidder #40, a collector

OWEN SPITZ, bidder #52, a taxidermist

WARDEN JOAN BASSET, a prison warden; mid-thirties

DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD, a prison psychiatrist; mid-thirties

DRAGOS DOGO DRAGOMIR, a Romanian-American antique dealer; late twenties

VIOLETA KOMODORESCU, Rozana's Romanian-American sister; late twenties

LUMINITSA ROMANI, a Roma gypsy savant; thirties

SUGGESTED DOUBLING:

Monique Malinois / Warden Joan Basset / Violeta Komodorescu
Rozana Komodorescu / Doctor Elaine Shepherd / Luminita Romani
Owen Spitz / Dragos Dragomir

TIME:

The past, present, and possible future

PLACE:

A stylized set represents an auction barn in Brunswick, Georgia; a cell in a women's prison in Central Florida; an apartment on Park Avenue in New York City; a forest in the Carpathian Mountains; and various auction houses of the future.

(The distant howling of hounds is heard on a summer evening in the rural outskirts of Brunswick, Georgia. Dim lights reveal the interior of an auction barn where five bidders are seated among the audience, clasping their numbered cards: COSMINA VALLHUND (#15), SONIA BORZOIAN (#24), MONIQUE MALINOIS (#40), ROZANA KOMODORESCU (#37) and OWEN SPITZ (#52). On stage is the auctioneer, TUCKER DANES, who stands beside a careworn trunk, holding a list of its contents, speaking with a southern accent.)

TUCKER

The last lot of the evening is a steamer trunk of odds and ends from Alchemy Antiques which as some of you know, closed last April when Monty Tervuren passed away at the ripe old age of one hundred. The hinges are rusty, but inside are the following treasures: Monty's vintage fedora festooned with mothballs; a portable Victrola with fifty-three vinyl records; the remains of his taxidermy collection which includes six ravens, a bat, rat, and four snakes which (*sniff*) exude a slight odor; an obsolete tattoo set with a box of needles; a silver plated hand mirror with the mirror missing; two Rosenthal china cups and saucers, all cracked; one Dresden poodle, slightly chipped; a faded silk parasol, and a bolt of blue velvet. So shall we start the bidding with an even hundred dollars?

(The FIVE BIDDERS stand, holding up their cards.)

TUCKER

One hundred and fifty? Two hundred; two hundred and fifty? Do I hear three hundred?

(MONIQUE (#40) seats herself.)

TUCKER

Three-fifty? Do I hear four hundred? Four-fifty? Five hundred?

(OWEN (#52) sits, and TUCKER points to the remaining BIDDERS as he speeds up his bidding calls.)

TUCKER

Five hundred and fifty; six hundred, six-fifty; seven hundred, seven-fifty; eight hundred, eight-fifty; nine hundred, nine-fifty! Shall we up the ante to one thousand? One thousand, one hundred, one thousand, three hundred, one thousand, five hundred, one thousand, eight hundred; two thousand! Two thousand, three hundred; two thousand five hundred; three thousand, three thousand, five hundred; four thousand, four thousand five hundred; five thousand, five thousand, five hundred; six thousand, six thousand, five hundred! Do I hear seven thousand? Eight thousand? Nine thousand? Ten thousand!

(Bidder SONIA (#24) seats herself, leaving only COSMINA (#15) and ROZANA (#37).)

TUCKER

I don't suppose you'd care to reveal which item you deem to be so precious? Did the mirror belong to Madame Pompadour? (*pause, no response*) Are those snakes a bygone species? (*pause*) Well then, shall we try for eleven thousand? Eleven thousand, five hundred; twelve thousand, twelve thousand, five hundred; thirteen thousand, thirteen thousand, five hundred; fourteen thousand; fifteen thousand; eighteen thousand; twenty thousand! Do I hear twenty-one thousand? Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-five, twenty-seven, thirty thousand! Do I hear thirty-one thousand, thirty-three, thirty-five, thirty-eight, forty thousand! Forty-two, forty-three, forty-five, forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty thousand!

(COSMINA (#15), a unkempt young woman, suddenly stands on tiptoe, shouting with a Romanian accent.)

COSMINA (#15)

Fifty-five thousand!

(ROZANA (#37) responds, also speaking with a Romanian accent.)

ROZANA (#37)

Fifty-six thousand!

COSMINA (#15)

Sixty thousand!

ROZANA (#37)

Sixty-one thousand!

COSMINA (#15)

Seventy thousand!

ROZANA (#37)

Seventy-one thousand!

COSMINA (#15)

Seventy-nine thousand!

ROZANA (#37)

Eighty thousand!

(COSMINA (#15) sits.)

TUCKER

Eighty thousand...? Going once, going twice, sold to bidder number thirty-seven for eighty thousand dollars! And that, ladies and gentlemen, concludes the bidding for today. Ma'am, will you please step on up here.

(ROZANA approaches the stage followed by SONIA who eavesdrops. MONIQUE and OWEN also approach, while COSMINA remains at a distance.)

TUCKER

(offering a handshake) How do you do? We accept cash, checks, and credit cards, and if you need to make arrangements for the removal of the trunk, I can recommend several reputable companies.

ROZANA

(writing a check) I think I can manage.

TUCKER

I don't suppose you'd care to divulge the particular item of value?

ROZANA

I'm afraid not.

TUCKER

Well, I'm flummoxed. Given the fact that Alchemy Antiques rarely sold items worth more than a hundred dollars.

ROZANA

I'm sorry, I really don't know.

TUCKER

You mean you just bid eighty thousand dollars and you don't know what for?!

ROZANA

That's right; I'm representing a client who instructed me to purchase the trunk.

SONIA

(speaking with a Romanian accent) Forgive me for interrupting. *(to Rozana)* Would you mind telling me your client's name and address?

ROZANA

I'm sorry, but he's a private collector who prefers to remain anonymous.

SONIA

Then please give him my card so he can contact me. (*to Tucker*) Can you tell me who will be receiving the proceeds from the sale?

TUCKER

Monty's great grandson who will be pleasantly surprised since my estimate was considerably lower. Truth be told, this is the largest sale this auction's ever had, and given the current state of the economy, it comes at a most opportune time, yes, indeed.

SONIA

Might I have his phone number and e-mail address?

TUCKER

I was only given a street address, but I'll tell you what: I'll give you the address if you'll tell me what in heaven's name you deemed so valuable?

SONIA

The tattoo set. It was used to tattoo the crude numbers on the forearms of prisoners during the Second World War.

TUCKER

Really? Now why on earth would Monty have that?

SONIA

After the prisoners were liberated, he confiscated the set and used it to cover their tattoos, changing the numbers into flowers, animals, and various designs. My name is Sonia Borzoian, and I represent the Bucharest War Memorial Museum. We were given a grant to secure the set, but it was obviously insufficient. (*to Rozana*) I assume that is what you were bidding on as well.

ROZANA

As I said, I was only told to purchase and deliver the trunk and its contents.

TUCKER

So was Monty a prisoner?

SONIA

He was a Romanian Romani also known as a Roma or gypsy. His real name was Dragos Dragomir, and yes, he was a prisoner.

TUCKER

Lord, I had no idea.

SONIA

With current surveillance technology, we can track surviving refugees -- even some who changed their names. Your newspaper obituary mentioned that Mister Tervuren was once a tattooist, and given his age and what we discovered to be a fabricated identity, we were quite certain he was Dragomir.

TUCKER

Well, a man has a right to reinvent himself, but why Monty? Sounds like he was one of the good guys.

SONIA

He was among many on both sides who wished to escape their pasts. People tend to think Germany was the sole perpetrator of the war, but Romania had its share of regrettable alliances, and the Romani were considered expendable by both countries. After Dragomir set up shop, he tattooed survivors at no cost.

TUCKER

Then you should know Monty was well liked here in Brunswick. Women were quite smitten by his old world manners. Some of us knew he was a tattooist before he took up antiques. In fact, he once showed me an album of his handiwork. His specialty was...

TUCKER

...dogs.

COSMINA

Dogs...

COSMINA

...cats, spiders, and snakes.

(TUCKER and SONIA turn to greet COSMINA while ROZANA steps aside to check her smartphone.)

TUCKER

Well, hello, young lady. Did you know Monty?

COSMINA

I was his apprentice.

TUCKER.

Now how in heaven's name can you be Monty's apprentice? He gave up tattooing before he moved here and he lived here for nearly forty years. Frankly, my dear, you don't look a day over twenty.

COSMINA

I knew him, and I'll find him.

TUCKER

Well, darlin', in case you weren't listening, your mentor passed away. I'm afraid he died in a fire, and I ought to know since I was his physician and helped identify his...remains.

(ROZANA approaches, scanning her smartphone.)

ROZANA

Excuse me, but I'm afraid there's a problem: I have a list here of all the items, and several appear to be missing.

TUCKER

Really? What items?

ROZANA

A gold pocket watch, a pair of gloves, and a bag of marbles.

TUCKER

The doors to this barn are locked, but vagrants have been known to sneak in through the windows and help themselves. Now how did your client get that list?

ROZANA

I don't know; I was only told to check the contents.

TUCKER

Well, you tell your client that we're just a simple, uninsured country auction with minimal security, but if he writes out a claim, I'll pass it to the police in Brunswick.

SONIA

(to Cosmina) And you...?

(MONIQUE and OWEN approach.)

MONIQUE

(with a southern accent) Hello, I was wondering if you might consider selling the Dresden poodle? I'm a collector and don't mind a few chips.

ROZANA

I'm sorry, I've been instructed to deliver the entire contents.

OWEN

(with a southern accent) Hi there, I'm Owen Spitz, Monty's taxidermist, and I was hopin' to buy back some of my handiwork. Please give your buyer my card. Do you need some help movin' that trunk?

ROZANA

Yes, thanks, my van's parked out back.

(ROZANA and OWEN leave with the trunk, followed by SONIA and MONIQUE, while COSMINA lingers.)

COSMINA

Hey, Doc, would you mind if I slept here tonight?

TUCKER

You're not serious?

COSMINA

Yes.

TUCKER

Well now, darlin', there's a decent bed and breakfast only a mile down the road.

COSMINA

No thanks. I could sleep on that bench in the back.

TUCKER

If you had the money to bid on the trunk, then surely you can afford a room for the night.

COSMINA

I'd rather stay here with the dead.

TUCKER

(pause, smiling) So you see the dead, do you?

COSMINA

(pointing) Right there.

TUCKER

Well, we attract all sorts.

COSMINA

They're smiling.

TUCKER

That's nice. Do they care to introduce themselves? I've been a doctor here for nearly thirty years so maybe I know them.

COSMINA

(pause, pointing) There's Edna Bedlington who fell off a boat and drowned; Glen Wheaton who drove his truck into a parked trailer; Gordon Pembroke who hung himself, a girl named Julie who...

COSMINA

...overdosed.

TUCKER

Overdosed...

TUCKER

...on Vicodin. That's enough! My god, girl, what in heaven's name are they doing here?

COSMINA

Watching us, but Miss Bedlington said you're a thief. She saw you steal the watch, the gloves, and the marbles.

TUCKER.

Damnation! I didn't think they'd be missed, and hell, old Monty was a friend so he wouldn't mind. Is Monty out there?

COSMINA

No, but Beatrice Bouvier said you're a drunk and your license to practice medicine was revoked for operating while...

TUCKER

Suspended! Not revoked! Suspended! And you tell Biddy Bouvier to mind her own goddamn business! I delivered those babies and they were fine -- two perfect butterballs. People still call me doctor, and I assist the county coroner.

COSMINA

But you're a drunk...?

TUCKER

Well, I take a drink now and then -- speaking of which... (*removing a flask from his pocket*) Care to join me? It's fine Tennessee whiskey.

COSMINA

No thanks.

TUCKER

(lifting his flask) To the deceased! So are they voyeurs lurking everywhere? Do they see us buck naked?

COSMINA

Yes, but they seem to like it here.

TUCKER

Well, auctions appeal to people still clinging to the past, but I thought the dead were drawn to a light, then flown up the celestial flue.

COSMINA

Not everyone sees the light, and some turn away.

TUCKER

So can they be of assistance to the living? Can they tell us which teams to wager or where to find true love?

COSMINA

They hardly ever speak, but Miss Bouvier calls you “a troubled soul.”

TUCKER

Ha! That’s true enough. I thought I was destined to spend my whole life tending the sick and dying. Instead I’m selling the flotsam they leave behind, most of it frivolous junk, though some things are truly precious -- like Monty’s gold watch. *(lifting the watch from his pocket)* That’s quite a gift you’ve got there, young lady. So do you hang out a shingle and console the grieving?

COSMINA

No way. The dead are as pathetic as the living, as clueless as they were alive.

TUCKER

Well, hell, I’m a skeptic, so this is a night of revelations. Now tell me, are they curious about you? Don’t they want to know why a pretty girl like you became a tattooist?

COSMINA

They don’t give a shit, but since you asked: When I lived in Zoltonovia, I walked into a gypsy’s parlor. There was a kid waiting for his brother, so I sketched a cobra on one arm and a mermaid on the other. Since the tattooist was sufficiently impressed, he asked me to become his apprentice. In America, he called himself Monty but to me he was always Dragos. We were supposed to meet here after I sold my shop in Florida. My last customer was an optician who wanted a third eye. I would have added a monocle if the bastards hadn’t come to arrest me.

TUCKER

Arrest you...?

COSMINA

I was tried and sentenced to death. (*pause*) I know you don't believe me, (*gesturing to the dead*) but your friends want to hear all about it.

TUCKER

Is that right?

(A distant howling is heard as COSMINA strolls into the past, entering a prison cell. SHE continues speaking while removing her jacket, revealing a prison tee shirt, exposing tattooed arms. WARDEN JOAN BASSET and DOCTOR ELAINE SHEPHERD stand nearby.).

COSMINA

The night before my execution, a shrink showed up with the warden asking to,...

COSMINA

...explain the procedure.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Explain the procedure...

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

...to Miss Vallhund.

WARDEN BASSET

(with a southern accent) I already have -- several times.

COSMINA

It takes four men to kill me: they'll buckle the belts, attach the electrodes, and before that, a barber shaves my head.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Is that really necessary?

WARDEN BASSET

Afraid so. It reduces resistance and minimizes burning.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

And strips the prisoner of her dignity.

WARDEN BASSET

Not this prisoner. In any case, electrocution was her preference. She could have chosen lethal injection, which would have been more appropriate.

COSMINA

Ha, ha! The party starts when they pull the switch and the current makes me piss myself. It might even make my eyeballs pop so they land on my cheeks.

WARDEN BASSET

I understand you'll be on call for the duration, but assume you won't be witnessing...

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Oh, I'll be there. I wouldn't miss the cold, premeditated murder of a young woman for all the world. She's obviously ill, possibly dying; it should make a difference.

(COSMINA slumps in her chair.)

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Oh, dear.

WARDEN BASSET

Relax,...

WARDEN BASSET

...she's asleep. She does that, just nods off, sometimes mid-sentence.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Is there anything I should know that isn't in her files?

WARDEN BASSET

The trouble is she's so damn mean and duplicitous, we're not inclined to chat. All anybody knows for sure is that six young men made the mistake of walking into her shop. Three died in a hospital in Gainesville, and the guy who testified shot himself. They just located the other two in a morgue in Orlando.

(Distant howlings are heard intermittently.)

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

I understand they were part of a gang.

WARDEN BASSET

Yes, but they weren't violent or threatening, so why didn't she just refuse to tattoo them?

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

The swastika is a deeply offensive symbol of oppression. It evokes very emotional responses.

WARDEN BASSET

That's what the defense claimed, but she's not even Jewish.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

She's a gypsy; they were also imprisoned, and she had a Sephardic grandmother on her father's side.

WARDEN BASSET

Yeah, but look at her: she's just a kid and the war's long over.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Not for everyone. Her parents may have lost relatives in the camps.

WARDEN BASSET

Maybe, though her lawyer couldn't prove it. She's one cold customer, and I'll tell you what's really strange -- what's been happening at night. In fact, it's already started; stick around and you'll hear for yourself -- the howls from hell.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Wolves...?

WARDEN BASSET

Dogs! As a trainer myself, I make sure this prison has the best canine corps in the system. We've got pit bulls, dobermans, rottweilers, and every last one has to be chained and muzzled or they'll run to her cell, yapping their fool heads off. It starts at a distance, then comes closer, and when it peaks, look out the window: every stray within a five mile radius is standing outside, howling themselves hoarse. Then suddenly it stops, the dogs settle down, and life goes on like nothing's happened. I'm telling you it's the creepiest damn thing I've ever seen -- scares the bejesus out of the prisoners.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

What's Cosmina doing during this?

WARDEN SHEPHERD

Just sitting till the howling peaks. Then she stands up and joins in. Believe me, Doctor, there's not a soul in this prison who doesn't want her gone. I'm told the Feds want you to find out how many people she's infected. She's destroyed her records, and no one's been able to get her to talk.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

And she certainly won't be talking when she's dead, now will she? Sometimes I think civilization in this country hasn't evolved one whit!

WARDEN BASSET

You're wrong, doctor; we've never executed a woman. For this county, it's an historic moment: we've finally got equality. Now I'll leave you two alone. (*pointing*) There's cameras there and there, and four armed guards within ten feet. Just holler if she bites.

(As WARDEN BASSET departs, COSMINA wakes.)

COSMINA

Has the bitch dyke left? (*pause*) Who are you? My usual shrink won't even open the fucking door.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

I was sent by people who feel your case merits more investigation, that you should still try to appeal.

COSMINA

No thanks.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

There are others who fear that with you gone they'll never know the number of people you infected and how.

COSMINA

The "how" is obvious: I contaminate the ink and prick the bastards. My specialty was dogs and horimono dragons.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

I've seen your dragons. (*pause*) Apparently, you have access to a pathogen related to paralytic rabies. By the time symptoms appear, it's attacked the central nervous system, inflaming the brain, and your victims end up frothing at the mouth before slipping into comas. I assume they were mostly men.

COSMINA

Pathetic dip shits who need to be inscribed to remember who the fuck they are -- I ought to know, ha, ha! My usual shrink says tattoos are a form of self defense against computers calculating all our assets. It's our way of owning art that's uncollectible. Where is she anyway? -- the usual shrink.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Doctor Chow asked me to take her place. I specialize in cases of vicarious trauma, people whose relatives suffered in wars and passed on their anxieties. We're discovering that the experience of parents, even great-grandparents, alters the molecular DNA in their sperm and eggs so certain traits, even memories, can be transmitted. It's called

DOCTOR SHEPHERD (cont'd)
transgenerational epigenetic inheritance.

COSMINA

No shit? So great granny's death camp fucked up my molecules.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

That and her culture, social status -- even her diet.

COSMINA

Then it's a good thing her gene pool's ending with me, but when I croak, I'll get a great reception. My clients are waiting with open arms, though I plan to hang around a few more decades.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

You don't seriously believe you'll survive electrocution...?

COSMINA

If I said it, I think it, but why should you care?

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Because Doctor Chow and I believe that being asked to tattoo swastikas was tantamount to assaulting you, which is why you need to appeal.

COSMINA

No thanks. Besides, I've tattooed plenty of sterile swastikas, but there was this moment when...

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

What...?

COSMINA

When I tattooed one too many. He was a mean ass skinhead who showed me a sketch as if I'd never seen the design. Can you fucking believe he didn't know it was called a swastika?! He said it was popular with guys who believed in the white man's right to rule the country. Then suddenly it wasn't enough to hate the bastard; I had to put him out of his misery.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

(pause) So far your particular virus has died in each victim, but there's fear it might become contagious since it doesn't just copy itself, it mutates and evolves. It's called "viral drift".

COSMINA

Oh, it's drifted all right. Would you believe it's drifted from the future to the past? No, of course not, so what's the point of this discussion? Either change the subject or stop wasting my time!

(The DOGS howlings reach a shrill crescendo as COSMINA leaps up to join them.)

COSMINA

Yooowwwwllllll!!!!

(The howls cease, and COSMINA faints to the floor.)

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Cosmina...? Are you all right? Wake up! (*taking her carotid pulse*) Oh, god -- guard! Guard! Someone call the doctor!!

(DOCTOR SHEPHERD dashes off as COSMINA stands, returning to the present, approaching TUCKER in the barn, continuing her story.)

COSMINA

I only pretended to faint 'cause no way was I ready to get zapped to zombieville. They carried me to the infirmary, and before daylight, I bolted, setting off alarms, but ordered the dogs to hang back, so I escaped, depriving the citizens of Florida of their barbaric ritual. I ran like hell to a house where I robbed the maid, changed clothes, then hitched a ride on a truck filled with key limes and kumquats.

TUCKER

Well, that's quite a story, but frankly, darlin', I don't care who you are, I still can't let you sleep here. I don't even know your name.

COSMINA

Cosmina. Tomorrow you'll drive me to New York.

TUCKER

I'll what...?!

COSMINA

You heard me. (*pointing to the dead*) They told me you live alone, and your next auction is three weeks from now.

TUCKER

I'll be happy to drive you to the bus station, but no way am I driving to New York.

COSMINA

You owe me! I'm the one who raised the bidding!

TUCKER

I assumed you had the money.

COSMINA

I have twelve dollars and change.

TUCKER

You realize that's highly unethical.

COSMINA

So is stealing. Look, I know you have the address -- Park Avenue, right?

TUCKER

That's nearly nine hundred miles, sixteen hours of driving!

COSMINA

So what? There's nothing to stop you.

TUCKER

Except common sense! Besides, the truck needs oil; I'd have to pack...

COSMINA

No problem. We'll leave in the morning; you'll have plenty of time.

TUCKER

What is it you want exactly? The tattoo set?

COSMINA

A reunion. He's regenerated by now.

TUCKER

Regenerated...?

COSMINA

Accelerated replication. He's become his younger self, so you'll hardly recognize him. We're from the same clan, but we're not like blood sucking vampires who get stuck in the bodies they had when they croaked.

TUCKER

I see, so what exactly are you?

COSMINA

Time-torquing gypsies who've been through shit you can't imagine. There's only twelve of us left, and we usually don't regenerate till we're at least fifty -- except for Dragos who wanted to experience extreme old age. He must have really liked it here.

TUCKER

Now that's the first thing you've said I know to be true. Monty loved this town, and he loved antiques, always kept the shop stock polished and pristine.

COSMINA

I just hope he's okay. I wouldn't be here myself if it weren't for my canine genes which is how I outran the guards.

TUCKER

Uh huh. Well, darlin', I think you're mad as a March hare on mushrooms. You know, there's nothing you've told me about the dead that isn't in the public record, and you could guess I was a thief, but you don't really know me from Adam. I'm a depressive dipsomaniac and a failure at just about everything.

COSMINA

Not friendship. The dead here are fond of you, and Dragos will be glad to see you again, especially when you return his watch, his marbles, and gloves.

TUCKER

Glove! There was only one. (*taking out the watch*) I must admit the watch is a marvel: it keeps perfect time, chimes the sweetest tunes, and when I tuck it in my pocket, I swear my heartbeat's regular and I don't sweat buckets -- even in this god awful heat.

COSMINA

That's because it comes from the future. So when are we leaving?

TUCKER

(*pause*) You'd trust an alcoholic thief with a rickety truck to drive you to New York?

COSMINA

I can drive as well.

TUCKER

Oh, swell. (*pause*) Not that I'm consenting, but will our deceased friends be joining us? It's a small truck.

COSMINA

Maybe. They can stack, fold, and shrink so they fit into pockets, but when I want them to get lost, they roll into dust balls and sink through the floors.

TUCKER

So are some of them our ancestors, decked out in buckskins and bustles?

COSMINA

No, I only see the recently dead, and they don't hang around past a few years.

TUCKER

That's all very interesting, but darlin', I still don't want you sleeping here. Let me drive you to the B and B. I'll pay, and no offense, but you look like you could use a bath and a good night's sleep. I'd invite you to my place, but I have cats.

COSMINA

(wrapping a blanket around herself) Please, let me stay. It feels so good to be in a barn after living in a cell. You can pick me up in the morning when you're ready. *(pause)* Trust me, I promise: no fires or wrecking the merchandise.

TUCKER

(he sighs) Jesus, mother of god, why would I do this? You're so smart, tell me why would I let you stay and drive to New York when my gut instinct is to toss you out?

COSMINA

Because you're under my gypsy spell, ha, ha! Or pathetic enough to take risks. Most people I tell about myself back off or call in the shrinks. To me you're a breath of fresh air.

TUCKER

(pause, he sighs) Well, hell, here's a flashlight if you need it. I'm locking the door, so use the window if you leave.

COSMINA

Turn off the lights on your way out.

TUCKER

I may change my mind!

COSMINA

You won't!

(TUCKER snaps off the lights, leaving COSMINA in the dark, aiming the flashlight and addressing the DEAD.)

COSMINA

Look, I don't give a shit if you stay, but I'm still mortal and need my sleep. Your doctor friend knows I'm stronger, smarter, and can see into his broken dreams. Tomorrow he'll pick me up and take me to a diner for coffee, biscuits, and a big juicy steak. Then we'll drive to New York and a whole new life!

(COSMINA turns off the flashlight as tinkling chimes and whirling stars appear, indicating a leap in time to a future auction where TUCKER has donned a bow tie and holds a tray of miniature boxes and several parasols.)

TUCKER

Feast your eyes on this rare assemblage of snuffboxes which belonged to the court jeweler of King George the Fourth. They contained a powdery tobacco sniffed by the aristocrats of France, Spain, and England. Most date back to the eighteenth century and feature enameled portraits of royalty or their pampered pets like this head of a foxhound. (*pointing to bidders*) So shall we start the bidding at one thousand dollars? Do I hear one thousand, five hundred? Two thousand? Two thousand, five hundred? Three thousand...

(The auction fades as Dragomir's luxurious apartment appears decorated with the contents of the auctioned trunk: the blue velvet is swagged into drapes; the snakes, ravens, rat, and bat are artfully posed along with an umbrella stand containing the parasol. DRAGOS DRAGOMIR, a dashing man dressed in black and wearing the fedora, is seated sipping tea from the china cup while listening to classical music on the Victrola. DRAGOMIR puts down the cup, dips his finger into a snuffbox filled with cocaine, then sniffs and sighs.) (VIOLETA KOMODORESCU, a graceful dancer, enters and hands DRAGOMIR a business card. THEY both speak with Romanian accents.)

VIOLETA

There's a woman here to see you.

DRAGOMIR

(*pause, reading the card*) Send her in.

(DRAGOMIR stands, removing his hat as SONIA enters and glances around the room.)

DRAGOMIR

How do you do, Miss?

SONIA

Please forgive me for not calling first. My name is Sonia Borzoian, from the Bucharest Memorial War Museum.

DRAGOMIR

(gesturing to a chair) Please be seated.

SONIA

The auctioneer gave me your address. I am not surprised to see that you are the one who bid on your great-grandfather's trunk.

DRAGOMIR

(turning off the record) Yes, I persuaded a friend to attend the auction on my behalf.

SONIA

But since you are his heir, wasn't the trunk yours to begin with?

DRAGOMIR

I was in mourning and forgot what treasures it might contain, so I foolishly instructed Doctor Danes to auction everything left in the shop. So often we do not know the value of our possessions until the moment we lose them to strangers, leaving black holes of regret in their place. Though I appear young, I am attracted to old things, like this porcelain tea cup. I wonder how many lips have touched its rim? How many eyes have stared at the painted pugs on the bottom. Were they blue eyes, green, or brown? Were they men or women? Beloved or betrayed? Perhaps you would like a cup? Or a glass of wine?

SONIA

No, thank you. *(pause)* Are you willing to sell the tattoo set?

DRAGOMIR

What will you do with it?

SONIA

Display it in our museum with pictures of Dragomir's tattoos. We want to acknowledge and honor him.

DRAGOMIR

So he will become a footnote in history -- a cover-up man, old Dragomir.

SONIA

I see your resemblance to pictures of him before the war. Did you know him well?

DRAGOMIR

Do we really know anyone well -- even ourselves?

SONIA

Perhaps not. I'm not a philosopher, only a curator.

DRAGOMIR

Well then, Miss Curator, the tattoo set is not for sale.

(Pause as DRAGOMIR presents a box to SONIA.)

DRAGOMIR

I donate it free of charge; take it with my blessing, but remember: a gift from a gypsy is infused with magic, so guard it with your life.

SONIA

Oh, yes, I promise. My colleagues will be most grateful, and you will be sent a formal letter from the museum director. Of course, we would also appreciate more pictures. Do you happen to have any?

DRAGOMIR

I am afraid not.

SONIA

Forgive me for asking, but do you have any of his tattoos yourself?

DRAGOMIR

A profile of a griffon (*pointing to his chest*) here.

SONIA

Would you permit me to take a photograph?

DRAGOMIR

I only bare my breast to my lovers.

SONIA

Oh. (*pause*) I...I would like to have seen his shop.

DRAGOMIR

Alchemy Antiques was appropriately named: a shop with vintage toys and trinkets transformed into a golden treasure trove of marvels. In fact, I will continue its legacy by opening a replica here in New York for Americans who have cultivated an appreciation for fine arts and antiques. I realize, of course, that abstraction, post-modernism, pixilated minimalism, et cetera, all have their virtues, but they do not move me. Neither do the geometrics of modern architecture, all the brutish, boxy monoliths of corporate capitalism.

SONIA

So you prefer castles with towers and turrets?

DRAGOMIR

With gargoyles, goddesses, and fat cheeked cherubs grasping garlands of lilies. In fact, I am negotiating to lease a shop in a building two blocks east.

SONIA

Will it also be called Alchemy Antiques?

DRAGOMIR

In bold curlicued script. (*pause*) Some philosophers believe that landscapes shape our characters, and I believe the objects we are drawn to shape our souls, objects like this snuffbox, formed by human hands, expressing its creator's vigor and inventiveness. To scorn such objects is to scorn the heart of humanity.

SONIA

It is lovely. Did it belong to Dragomir?

DRAGOMIR

Yes, he filled it with potent powders to stimulate his senses. Would you care to try some?

SONIA

No, thank you.

DRAGOMIR

(*dipping his finger*) Do you think me decadent?

SONIA

A little, but also generous, and it is a pleasure to meet a man who appreciates the beautiful things of this world.

DRAGOMIR

You yourself are very beautiful. You must have a husband or lover...?

SONIA

I did, but now I only have my dog, a vizsla named Luca.

DRAGOMIR

The men of Bucharest must be blind, but here they worship the louche gods of Eros, so they will appreciate you. In any case, you are young; your future awaits.

SONIA

So does yours. Are you married?

DRAGOMIR

Once I had a loving wife, a woman of rare sensitivity, but even the virtuous can become...debased. (*pause*) So are you a collector?

SONIA

Not seriously, though I have six pewter trivets and four embroidered footstools. Will Alchemy Antiques sell footstools?

DRAGOMIR

Of course, and carved furniture, Persian rugs, fine china and crystal, all manner of statuary, especially animals. Dragomir believed our homes should display reminders of the creatures with which we share the earth: stag horns, leopard pillows, peacock feathers, paintings of horses and hounds. In mythology, great hounds guarded the gates to the world beyond, and Dragomir claimed his own had benevolent powers.

SONIA

(*gesturing to the animals*) Were these also his pets?

DRAGOMIR

No, only creatures he admired.

SONIA

Even the bat?

DRAGOMIR

That is pteropus vampyrus, also known as the flying fox or vampire bat.

SONIA

In Romania there are rumors that Dragomir survived the camps because he was descended from an infamous gypsy vampire, also named Dragomir.

DRAGOMIR

Nonsense! The first Dragomir was a physician who traveled through the Balkans in the late seventeenth century. There was a recurrence of the plague so he experimented with medicinal herbs and plants, venturing deep into the Carpathian Mountains with his dog, Darco. There he met a reclusive gypsy savant who taught him the secret science of replication, which meant his organs, flesh, and bones were returned to the optimal form and functions of youth. When Dragomir returned to his clan, he shared this knowledge on the condition they never reveal the process.

SONIA

What a pity. That is the kind of gypsy magic some people would pay dearly for.

DRAGOMIR

If you believe in gypsy magic, but where are the gypsies now? Here we are assimilated, but in Europe we are still stigmatized as rootless thieves, beggars, and abductors of blue-eyed children. Of course, even New York has a few clannish Romas selling trinkets and telling fortunes. Would you like to know your future?

SONIA

No, I prefer to be surprised.

DRAGOMIR

I agree, especially when surprises can be so (*smiling*)...enchanting. Being a museum curator, I assume you prefer the lost glories of vanished worlds to the current onslaught of miseries. Permit me to speculate: (*pause, staring*) Unlike your colleagues, you are not enthralled by electronic innovations; you still read bound books, write letters by hand, and do your shopping in person.

SONIA

True, I prefer to conduct business with real people.

DRAGOMIR

And are you “real?” With your pale complexion and violet eyes you could be an apparition.

SONIA

No, I’m real, and so was the young woman who also bid on the trunk. She claimed to be Dragomir’s apprentice.

DRAGOMIR

Did she?

SONIA

She kept raising the bidding price, so clearly the trunk and its contents were of great value to her.

DRAGOMIR

But more to me, and worth every penny since it brought you here.

SONIA

Was the tattoo set what you wanted?

DRAGOMIR

No. What I wanted was priceless, but as a dealer, I know that true intrinsic value and market value are often disconnected, arbitrary, even whimsical, especially in degenerate cultures that value corporate moguls, athletes, film stars and financiers more than poets, artists, teachers, caretakers, and everyone working with purity of purpose. So what is true intrinsic worth? Something as elusive as a woman's charms. (*pause*) Why are you smiling?

SONIA

(*pause*) I was wondering how many women have seen your tattoo?

DRAGOMIR

Not nearly enough. Why? Are you curious?

SONIA

I might be.

DRAGOMIR

The bidding price could be high.

SONIA

Will it be worth it?

DRAGOMIR

Definitely -- if you are willing to pay.

SONIA

What do you want?

DRAGOMIR

We could start with a kiss.

(DRAGOMIR pulls her towards him and THEY kiss.

DRAGOMIR

Well then, Miss Borzoian, would you care to see the rest of the apartment? I have a boudoir suite dating back to Louis the Fourteenth.

SONIA

Please call me Sonia.

(DRAGOMIR and SONIA depart as chimes resound, stars swirl, and TUCKER appears at a future auction holding several swords.)

TUCKER

What collector of weaponry can resist these daggers, sabers, and swords?! Shall we start with this single edged Japanese katana that dates back to the fifteenth century. Notice the ivory hilt with inlaid akitas crafted for a Samurai who could slice a man in half with a single blow! Yes, before guns, gas, and laser guided drones, wars were conducted by brave sword-wielding warriors willing to confront their enemies face to face. Now shall we start the bidding at a thousand dollars? Do I hear two thousand? Two thousand five hundred? Three thousand,...

(As lights fade on TUCKER, DRAGOMIR reappears in his apartment wearing a silk robe. SONIA sits nearby with her hair unpinned. THEY drink wine while listening to classical music until VIOLETA enters.)

VIOLETA

Cosmina's here with a man, a Doctor Danes.

DRAGOMIR

(he sighs) I suppose you should send them in.

(VIOLETA departs and SONIA quickly pins her hair.)

SONIA

I should leave.

DRAGOMIR

No, please stay.

(COSMINA and TUCKER enter; DRAGOMIR stands.)

COSMINA

Hello, Dragos, surprised to see me?! Where's my kiss?

(COSMINA puckers her lips but DRAGOMIR kisses her cheek, then steps back.)

COSMINA

You remember the doctor?

DRAGOMIR

(extending his hand) How do you do?

TUCKER

I don't believe we've met. I'm Doctor Danes, but please call me Tucker. Your great granddaddy and I were the best of friends. *(to Sonia)* Well, I see one of our bidders -- the lady from the museum. So you're here to buy the tattoo set?

SONIA

Yes, but it was donated as a gift.

DRAGOMIR

I am certain Dragomir would have wanted it placed in her care.

SONIA

We are extremely grateful.

COSMINA

I bet you are.

TUCKER

(to Dragomir) Well, you certainly paid dearly for Monty's treasures.

COSMINA

There were some missing items that ole Tuck here seems to have found.

TUCKER

Pilfered actually -- as mementoes. I suppose you'll be wanting Monty's watch.

DRAGOMIR

Yes, thank you.

TUCKER

(handing the watch to Dragomir) You wouldn't be willing to sell it, would you?

DRAGOMIR

Never.

TUCKER

You know, that trunk of his was quite a surprise -- hidden behind some crates in the cellar. We assumed he forgot it -- not that Monty ever showed signs of senility. In fact, he possessed an amazing breadth of knowledge, and his shop was a joy to behold. Did you know him well?

DRAGOMIR

Well enough.

COSMINA

Hah!

COSMINA

This is a nice little party. Aren't you going to offer us some drinks?

DRAGOMIR

Of course.

(DRAGOMIR rings a bell, summoning VIOLETA who appears instantly.)

DRAGOMIR

Violeta, would you please bring more wine and some refreshments for our guests.

COSMINA

Hey, Vi, did you miss me?

(VIOLETA ignores COSMINA and departs as TUCKER strokes a raven.)

TUCKER

So will you be keeping Monty's menagerie?

DRAGOMIR

Perhaps. I was telling Sonia that I intend to open a shop here in Manhattan. After all, New York is the mecca of consumerism.

TUCKER

Why that's wonderful. I could serve as your representative in Georgia, inform you of any exceptional collectables that come my way. You know, Monty was a regular at my auctions, called them "dog auctions" 'cause there was always some bric-a-brac pups on sale. Ole Monty was a devout dog lover.

COSMINA

Being part dog himself.

DRAGOMIR

Really, Cosmina...

TUCKER

So have you lived in the city long?

DRAGOMIR

Long enough to observe the insidious effect of incessant noise, police paranoia, people staring at screens, constantly communing instead of seeking the solitude required to create the wonders of art, music, and poetry. I fear they may soon be forsaken.

TUCKER

Oh, certainly not. If you give yourself time, I'm sure you'll find some like-minded friends. You're just feeling lonely.

DRAGOMIR

When I long for fresh companionship, I simply step onto the subway at rush hour and press my flesh into the huddled masses.

COSMINA

That's pathetic.

DRAGOMIR

Is it really? Is one person really so different from another?

COSMINA

(to Tucker) He's just like his great-granddaddy: he prefers things to people.

TUCKER

Well darlin', people break our hearts and die, but their precious possessions live on, and sometimes they...well, they speak to us.

DRAGOMIR

Precisely! You understand that every object has a tale to tell. This little brass bell had a creator, a destiny, and is a material manifestation: a tangible bell reflection of its divine bell reality. In any case, I am rarely lonely. Violeta and her sister, Rozana, live here as well, and I intend to adopt one, perhaps two dogs.

COSMINA

The trouble with dogs is they die.

TUCKER

Cosmina here claims she can see the dead.

DRAGOMIR

She is gifted, though impulsive and likes to court danger.

COSMINA

I can't help myself; I'm shit full of bad memories.

TUCKER

She also claims to have been in prison.

DRAGOMIR

Cosmina is a very bad girl with a very dark heart.

COSMINA

Fuck you. (*growling*) Grrrrrrrrr...

DRAGOMIR

Please, try to behave; there is a lady present.

SONIA

Pardon me, but I really must leave. I have an appointment with at the Romanian Cultural Institute. Thank you again for your generosity. (*to Tucker and Cosmina*) Good bye.

TUCKER

It started to rain when we came. I hope you brought...

TUCKER

...an umbrella!

DRAGOMIR

An umbrella!

DRAGOMIR

Ah! I have a parasol instead.

(DRAGOMIR retrieves a parasol that resembles the auctioned parasol.)

DRAGOMIR

Here, my dear, take this.

SONIA

Oh, no, it is much too beautiful, too delicate for the rain.

DRAGOMIR

Not at all, and you may return it when we meet again. Now let me escort you to the elevator.

(DRAGOMIR walks SONIA out the door, whispering in her ear, leaving TUCKER and COSMINA alone.)

COSMINA

Thank Christ she's gone! So Tuck, aren't you glad you came? My gypsy lover boy knows how to live.

(Pause as TUCKER takes a swig from his flask.)

COSMINA

Feeling a little dry, are we?

TUCKER

Just a little.

(DRAGOMIR returns.)

COSMINA

Back so soon? So did you fuck her?

DRAGOMIR

What do you want? Why are you here?

COSMINA

You invited me, remember?

DRAGOMIR

That was before you became a felon. (*to Tucker*) In case you have not heard, the F.B.I. is searching for Cosmina.

TUCKER

Jesus, it's true...?

DRAGOMIR

This morning her picture was posted on the Internet.

COSMINA

Fortunately, I look like lots of girls my age.

DRAGOMIR

You are careless! Sonia just saw you; the door man saw you; everyone at the auction saw you. They already know you hitchhiked on a fruit truck and were dropped off at the barn. It is only a matter of time before they track you to the city. (*to Tucker*) What has Cosmina told you about herself?

COSMINA

Everything! I even told him about you. Of course, he didn't believe me and now he's in shock. Well, get over it, Tuck, and look closely: (*pointing to Dragomir*) this is your pal, Monty, years younger, but still Monty.

TUCKER

Sorry, I don't see much resemblance, but if you're Monty, then you know we played poker together, and sometimes he loaned me money. So what else did he do for me?

DRAGOMIR

(*pause*) Among many favors, he saved your life.

TUCKER

How?

DRAGOMIR

After you were abandoned by your wife and daughter, you attempted suicide.

TUCKER

How?

DRAGOMIR

By hanging.

TUCKER

Only Monty knows that -- unless he confided in you. (*to Cosmina*) He rang the doorbell just as I was about to step off the stool, and god help me, I slipped off the rope and answered. Then he stayed till the black bubes of despair dissolved. (*pause*) So if you're really Monty, what was I wearing?

DRAGOMIR

Blue striped pajamas, and your stethoscope.

TUCKER

What was I drinking?

DRAGOMIR

Jack Daniel's whiskey.

TUCKER

What was my daughter's name?

DRAGOMIR

Hannah.

TUCKER

My wife?

DRAGOMIR

Olivia. Enough, please!

TUCKER

But I...I identified his remains.

DRAGOMIR

Familiar spectacles amid ashes and charred bones from my collection.

COSMINA

Tell him the truth, Dragos, tell him.

DRAGOMIR

He may not wish to know.

TUCKER

Oh, I'm all ears. Cosmina claims you dodge the Reaper and become your younger selves.

DRAGOMIR

Without the tedium of childhood and adolescence. We replicate to our mid-twenties so we experience a parade of generational successions while being in our prime years. Of course, the burden of belonging to any generation is that it traps you with your contemporaries, most of them blind to the past and making the same mistakes, only with crueler, more efficient weapons. Our current generation, like previous ones, considers the world to be in a precarious state, only now we are more justified than ever.

COSMINA

So what do you think, Tuck?

TUCKER

(pause) If what you say is possible, then my god... I mean it must be wonderful to be given more chances to stand on the cusp: no midlife crisis, no bemoaning the trails untrod, the books unread, the art unseen...

DRAGOMIR

The music unheard, the oceans never sailed...

TUCKER

Rivers never fished...

DRAGOMIR

Cities never toured...

TUCKER

Wines never tasted...

DRAGOMIR

Women never kissed...

COSMINA

Lovers never loved enough!

TUCKER

Yes, well, who wouldn't want new futures stretched out to accomplish great things.

DRAGOMIR

Of course our possibilities are still limited by the talents we originally possessed.

COSMINA

He means the gene pool of our inbreeding parents.

DRAGOMIR

We have all been imprisoned or displaced which tends to make us see the world as threatening -- unlike many Americans who see the world as their oyster, and snatch the pearls while knowing nothing of history.

(VIOLETA enters with a tray of cakes, sandwiches, and a decanter of wine and glasses.)

DRAGOMIR

Ah, Violeta, my dear, please join us. Violeta is one of us.

COSMINA

A real bitch. (*yapping*) Ruff, ruff!

VIOLETA

(*to Tucker*) Would you like some wine?

TUCKER

Yes, thank you.

COSMINA

(glancing at the tray) What? No dog biscuits?

(COSMINA grabs a few cakes and gobble them.)

DRAGOMIR

Cosmina, your manners!

TUCKER

(to Violeta) Mmm, this sandwich is delicious.

VIOLETA

In past lives, I worked in bakeries, cooked in taverns and restaurants, but now I'm taking classes in dance.

DRAGOMIR

Imagine over three centuries old and training to be a ballerina.

(VIOLETA spins across the room.)

DRAGOMIR

Bravvaa! Such grace! Rozana plays the guitar, and together they perform for my amusement. Perhaps later they will consent to entertain us.

COSMINA

I can hardly wait.

DRAGOMIR

Violeta and Rozana have lived in the city for nearly a century. After our reunion, Violeta agreed to do the cooking and Rozana is my chauffeur.

TUCKER

Well, you certainly live like a king.

COSMINA

It beats sleeping in coffins.

DRAGOMIR

I invested wisely, but Cosmina has a point: Americans romanticize vampires -- repellent blood sucking revenants who sleep in graves -- while time-traveling gypsies are considered too fantastical to be real much less romantic. The few times I've shared my lineage, I was ridiculed, accused of having a fevered imagination.

TUCKER

Well, it's still hard to believe you're Monty. I mean, you're talking about a quantum leap from extreme senectitude to vibrant youth.

DRAGOMIR

It was my most exhilarating replication: I could feel electrochemical consciousness pulsating through every cell, smoothing the reptilian webbings of my skin, making my vision clear, my hearing keen, my energy restored.

TUCKER

Along with your hair!

DRAGOMIR

Violeta was my witness; tell him.

VIOLETA

He stood naked before the mirror, staring at his flat belly.

DRAGOMIR

Then I dressed, and Violeta and I walked outside, delighting in the city!

(DRAGOMIR grasps VIOLETA'S arm and strolls about the room.)

DRAGOMIR

Ah, the sidewalks are full of people, look at the magnificent shop windows! Now let's stroll through Central Park: behold the elms, the oaks; the phlox and lilies! Every person, every pigeon is radiant, glowing with life! Ha, ha! (*pause as he returns to his chair*) Believe me, my friend, my lives and the lives of my clan have been full. We walk among you with great pride; witnesses to all the social changes and inventions of our times.

COSMINA

Yeah, and the wars -- millions picked off like ticks off a dog's tail.

DRAGOMIR

We have all become catastrophists, but as a physician, I also think of history in terms of medical discoveries -- from antibiotics to stem cells that grow new lungs and livers.

VIOLETA

All my lives are so jumbled in my mind, I stopped trying to think chronologically.

DRAGOMIR

No offense, Violeta, but you don't think much at all. You have many fine qualities, but historical facts and ideas do not seem to interest you. (*to Tucker*) She prefers twittered trivia and boorish celebrity blogs.

VIOLETA

(*to Tucker*) There's too much to remember; I was never good with dates. (*to Dragomir*) You and Rozana life in past, always reminiscing. I prefer to live in the present.

TUCKER

I can't even imagine all the places you've been, the things you've seen.

DRAGOMIR

We have plied our trades in cities and towns, but ancestral scars make us essentially the same, though I have lived (*consulting the watch*) three hundred and twenty-six years; one hundred and eighteen thousand, nine hundred and ninety days.

TUCKER

But how...? I mean, how do you "replicate"?

VIOLETA

Go on, Dragos, tell him.

DRAGOMIR

In 1689 I was a relic at sixty, but still a practicing physician and amateur alchemist. Every week I gathered herbs in the forest, accompanied by my dog, Darco.

(As DRAGOMIR continues, shimmering lights reveal LUMINITSA, a majestic woman covered in jewels and scarves who speaks with a Hindustani accent.)

DRAGOMIR

One day we came upon a stone hovel. Inside was a woman who claimed to be from the original Roma tribe of Northern India which means she was born nearly a thousand years ago. After I introduced myself, she presented me with several...

DRAGOMIR

...gifts.

LUMINITSA

Gifts...

LUMINITSA

...will change your life: Behold this crystal sphere, an amazing electrified enigma, and these gloves with which to grasp the sphere.

DRAGOMIR

I asked what she meant by “electrified”?

LUMINITSA

You shall know soon enough. If you dare to glimpse the future, focus on the spheres within the sphere, then speak the time and place you wish to visit. (*handing over the pocket watch*) Now here is a watch which has functions that will increase in value with the coming years. And now to bestow the greatest of gifts: from the science of molecular regeneration, comes an instrument that implants a device that initiates limitless replications. Rather than explain, I shall demonstrate on your dog. Come, let us find him.

(A DOG yaps as LUMINITSA departs.)

DRAGOMIR

We found Darco, and rejuvenated him to a frisky pup until he yapped at a wild boar that slashed his throat with its tusks. I still cannot bear to think of it!

VIOLETA

Poor Dragos was inconsolable, but the gypsy assured him he would feel better once he used the instrument on himself and the elders of our clan, which included me, Rozana and Cosmina, so we all became our beautiful, fresh-faced younger selves.

DRAGOS

But that was when I realized my benevolent sage was possibly deranged. You see, when we replicated, we wound up with Darco’s spare molars and sharp cuspids.

COSMINA

See? (*showing off her teeth, growling*) Grrrrrrrr...

TUCKER

Good lord!

DRAGOMIR

Thanks to genetic testing, I discovered we possess an extra sequence of canine nucleotides which accounts for our being swift footed, with an acute sense of smell, hearing, and a ravenous hunger for meat. For most of us it appears to have been a blessing.

COSMINA

Except for the dog breath and a tendency to attract other breeds. Hey, Vi, let’s show Tuck how we howl. Yooooowwwwwwrrrr...

DRAGOMIR

Shhhh! Behave yourself!

VIOLETA

Shhhhhh! The neighbors!

TUCKER

(pause) So what's this replicator look like?

DRAGOMIR

It resembles a garlic press that inserted sensors into our navels. Violeta and Cosmina can show you theirs.

(COSMINA and VIOLETA pull up their shirts, revealing glistening jewels in their navels.)

COSMINA

The prison doc tried to remove it, but I screamed bloody murder and bit his hand.

TUCKER

So after your rejuvenation, were you still a physician?

DRAGOMIR

Yes, and progressed in my education to a series of specialists, though I was also a chemist, landscape painter, tattooist, and finally joined the merchant class with the purchase of Alchemy Antiques.

TUCKER

What about you, Cosmina?

COSMINA

Since I sewed, I was seamstresses and milliners until I finally went to school and learned to become an illustrator. But being a woman I was also stalked, beaten, raped, and treated like a fucking slave. Isn't that right, Vi? Remember the Iron Guard? The bastards gave us crabs.

VIOLETA

The nightmares were worse. That's why I'm sick of the past. You tell him, but keep me out of it.

COSMINA

At first, pale gypsies like me and Violeta were considered Aryans till they decided we were contaminated from shacking up with outsiders. So they rounded us up along with Jews and cripples, then deported us to camps where they branded us like fucking cattle.

DRAGOMIR

Cosmina was in the woman's camp, so after being together for two and a half centuries, we were separated and did not meet until years after the war when she strolled into my tattoo shop and stole my heart once again.

COSMINA

Bullshit! You dumped me; you left!

DRAGOMIR

(to Tucker) I grew weary of Romania, of Europe and all the non-gypsies who still want to slaughter us. I told Cosmina we had to learn English and leave for America, but she refused, so I left without her. Then we lost touch until she came to Miami and I tracked her through the Internet.

COSMINA

So how do you like my idiomatic English? My teacher said I could pass as a native.

DRAGOMIR

You still have an accent.

COSMINA

And you just came off the boat!

TUCKER

(to Dragomir) So how did you wind up in Georgia of all places?

DRAGOMIR

An American tourist left his newspaper on a café table. I read of a hardware and gift shop for sale called Alchemy Antiques and considered it an omen.

TUCKER

But in Georgia you could have lived in Atlanta or Savannah, or any city with more cultured people.

DRAGOMIR

None like you, Doctor. Most drunkards are tiresome melancholics who consume our energy. They are the true vampires, but you... Who can explain why the presence of a certain person is like a benevolent breeze that makes us grateful to remain among the living.

COSMINA

Even the dead like him.

DRAGOMIR

Within your besotted breast lies the tender heart of a romantic, idealistic man.

TUCKER

Not man enough to keep his family from leaving.

DRAGOMIR

That, my friend, is their tragic loss.

TUCKER

Well, I'm glad you think so highly of me, but I have many regrets. Truth be told, I've snatched from nearly every auction I've ever held -- mostly small items like sugar tongs, thimbles, cufflinks.

DRAGOMIR

Ah, but do you collect for the sake of collecting or do you appreciate the consolation of objects?

TUCKER

Maybe both. There's all sorts of ways of filling the hollows made by wounds, though some cut too deeply, and maybe that explains it. You see, I've been wondering: If spawning all your mini-mees is so wonderful, why are so few of you left?

VIOLETA

We can still be killed, and our clan was small to begin with.

DRAGOMIR

Most of us died in the First and Second World Wars. Others became depressed and reached a threshold of curiosity, a spiritual inertia.

COSMINA

Zombieville. They start sitting it out, stop giving a shit.

TUCKER

What about children?

VIOLETA

Once we replicate, we no longer propagate.

DRAGOMIR

Why would we? Most people want progeny to redeem the lives they have wasted, but we keep giving ourselves new ones.

VIOLETA

Some of us chose not to replicate. They thought it perverse to outlive their children or become the same age or younger. Rozana and I recently lost our cousin, Nadia, and seven others drowned in a trawler in the North Sea. That means only four of us are left: we three and Rozana.

COSMINA

What?! Fuck! (*to Dragomir*) Just us...?

DRAGOMIR

I am afraid so.

COSMINA

Since when?!

VIOLETA

Since last month.

COSMINA

Jesus...

VIOLETA

(*to Tucker*) That's why we have to keep working; to stop living in the past. Nadia's decline started with dreams of people she'd forgotten she knew from places she'd forgotten she'd been.

DRAGOMIR

Memories can be oppressive, yet without them we are diminished, especially memories of the names of things that tether us to the world, words like "fedora."

VIOLETA

"Symphony."

COSMINA

"Swastika!"

VIOLETA

We tend to replicate by the time we're seventy or sooner if we start losing our health or our minds. I begged Nadia; I kept reminding her of all the beauty in the world: the songs of birds, the passing of seasons, (*smiling*) how Dragos and I love the snow...

COSMINA

Really? So what was he doing in Georgia?

DRAGOMIR

Learning to love the sun! (*kissing Violeta's cheek*) Ha, ha!

TUCKER

So how did Nadia die?

VIOLETA

Drugs and alcohol -- not very original. Her final text was "I'm so over myself." She spent her last years in filthy rooms playing video poker. She was tired of burying her pets -- not to mention her friends -- and keeping her condo clean, her hair washed, folding laundry, mopping floors...

COSMINA

Fuck! Think of all the hair we've cut, toenails clipped; all the cows slaughtered to feed us, the fish caught, the apples picked...

DRAGOMIR

Enough, Cosmina.

COSMINA

...the liters of wine drunk, the shit flushed, the monthly blood pouring out of my...

VIOLETA

Really, Cosmina!

DRAGOMIR

That's enough! Now stop!

DRAGOMIR

The trouble with replications is that we cease wanting to live like post-adolescents in our twenties even when we are -- except for some of us who never grow up.

COSMINA

He means me 'cause I can sleep anywhere anytime.

DRAGOMIR

With anyone.

COSMINA

You should talk!

VIOLETA

Please, don't start.

COSMINA

(growling) Grrrrrrrrr...

TUCKER

(pause) So regeneration doesn't guarantee...maturity.

DRAGOMIR

Or superiority. Of course, we hope to evolve since it excuses our recycling.

TUCKER

Yes, well, a single lifespan is hardly time enough, is it?

DRAGOMIR

So replication appeals to you, doctor?

TUCKER

Oh, sure. I mean, do any of us ever truly fulfill our potential? Our dreams? So do your old selves end up in the obituaries like Monty?

DRAGOMIR

No, we are usually listed as missing, presumed murdered or drowned. We try not to encounter people who knew us, people who grew old.

COSMINA

If they see us, they freak; they think they're seeing clones or ghosts.

TUCKER

(to Violeta) Speaking of ghosts, are you still in contact with your cousin? I mean, since you can see the dead.

VIOLETA

I can't see them; neither can Dragos. Cosmina's our only medium. I think I would find them invasive, but Cosmina enjoys chatting with the dead, don't you?

COSMINA

Sure, when I'm bored with the living.

VIOLETA

Are they here now?

COSMINA

(staring out) Oh, we have quite an audience. They're waiting to see what Tuck's going to do next.

TUCKER

Actually, I ought to be leaving.

DRAGOMIR

Please, you must stay. I have a guest room; you will be very comfortable.

TUCKER

Well, I'm grateful, but I plan to attend an estate sale in Darien, so I'll head out of the city, check into a motel, then drive to Brunswick in the morning.

DRAGOMIR

I am afraid you do not appreciate our situation: By now someone at the auction will have identified Cosmina, so police will be tracking her movements along with your truck, your credit cards, phone calls, which is why I've taken the precaution of removing the battery.

(DRAGOMIR holds up Tucker's smartphone.)

TUCKER

How in the devil...?!

DRAGOMIR

Gypsy magic.

TUCKER

(snatching his phone) Well, give it back! Now I'm leaving; I've done nothing wrong!

DRAGOMIR

Nothing but aided an escaped criminal. Care to take a look?

(DRAGOMIR retrieves an I-Pad, tapping the screen.)

COSMINA

See, Tuck, we're famous.

TUCKER

(staring at the screen) My god...

DRAGOMIR

The Times is calling Cosmina "The Toxic Tattooist."

COSMINA

No shit? Where?

VIOLETA

(pointing to the screen) There.

TUCKER

Christ almighty...

VIOLETA

In The Post, you're "The Rabid Romanian."

DRAGOMIR

Cosmina is what they call an asymptomatic carrier. She remains healthy but her body contains a virulent virus.

TUCKER

Well, this is all very...disconcerting, but I still intend to leave.

DRAGOMIR

I'm afraid not.

TUCKER

I beg your pardon?

DRAGOMIR

You heard me.

TUCKER

Are you threatening me?

(DRAGOMIR rings his bell and ROZANA enters brandishing a sword displayed in the auction.)

TUCKER

Jesus!

COSMINA

Hey there, Rozie, ha ha!

VIOLETA

Really, Dragos...

TUCKER

You can't be serious?!

DRAGOMIR

Rozana is an expert at kenjutsu; she also monitors our security cameras.

TUCKER

Oh, I recognize her from the auction. (*to Rozana*) You wouldn't injure an unarmed man?

ROZANA

Never! Would you prefer dueling daggers or fencing foils?

TUCKER

What I'd prefer is to leave the premises!

DRAGOMIR

Not possible. You will be found and questioned, and drunkards cannot be trusted, so why not accept our hospitality with grace? After all, my bid on the trunk made you a richer man.

TUCKER

You can't be Monty; he'd never do this to me!

DRAGOMIR

Why? Because you assumed Monty was homosexual like you -- not that you were mistaken. After enough replications, one tends to become pansexual, though I appreciate the irony. Remember the night we embraced, and you said I was too old? Well, now I am too young, ha, ha! Why look so wounded? Your friends esteemed you enough to tread lightly around your closet -- not that anyone needs closets any more. Forgive me for asking, but is that why Olivia left you?

TUCKER

You're despicable!

DRAGOMIR

Perhaps. Now resign yourself to abandoning your plans, to having an experience beyond your usual phenomenological boundaries. Now please, Rozana, escort Doctor Danes to the lavender room. He might like to freshen up before dinner. We dine at eight.

(ROZANA gestures for TUCKER to follow, and THEY depart as COSMINA speaks.)

COSMINA

Tsk, tsk, poor ole Tuck. (*pause*) So are you fucking each other now?

VIOLETA

(*to Dragos*) I told you she'd find us and ruin everything!

COSMINA

Thanks, Vi. Hey, have you got any clothes I can borrow? I know lover boy likes us to dress for dinner.

DRAGOMIR

Please loan her some decent clothes. (*to Cosmina*) And for godssake take a bath and do something about your hair.

COSMINA

Careful, I have fleas, (*barking*) ruff ruff!

DRAGOMIR

(*to Violeta*) If she misbehaves, let me know and I will give her a good thrashing! I should mention that I have invited Miss Borzoian to join us for dinner.

VIOLETA

You what...?

COSMINA

You're kidding?

DRAGOMIR

You heard me.

COSMINA

Shit.

VIOLETA

Please tell me you're joking.

DRAGOMIR

Set an extra place at the table.

VIOLETA

But why...?

COSMINA

(growling) Grrrrrrrrrr...

DRAGOMIR

I have my reasons, *(to Cosmina)* and I expect you to be on your best behavior!
No drooling or licking the plates!

(COSMINA snarls as DRAGOMIR marches off. The WOMEN stand frozen in time as TUCKER appears at a future auction, holding a tray of inkwells.)

TUCKER

Behold these ink pots from the Parisian shops of bygone days when the gentry scripted letters on fine linen stationery. This pot dates back to Napoleon the Third, and features a hinged lid with an etching of airedales, but is small enough to fit in the pocket of a traveling scrivener. You'll notice it has a matching bell that summoned servants when letters were ready for posting. Now, shall we start the bidding at two thousand dollars? Do I hear two thousand five hundred? Three thousand? Three thousand, five hundred...

(TUCKER'S voice trails off as COSMINA confronts VIOLETA in the parlor.)

COSMINA

Please don't hate me, Vi. If I start to drive you nuts, I'll leave.

VIOLETA

(walking away) You should never have come!

COSMINA

Don't go! Please, Vi, talk to me! We were friends once, remember?

VIOLETA

(pause) What happened...?

COSMINA

Time happened, a whole chorus line of Cosminas, each one growing smaller.

VIOLETA

And meaner and crazier! (*pause, she sighs*) I miss the old Cosmina.

COSMINA

Yeah, well I miss a lot of things -- like camping in forests; I miss cleaner air, fresher lakes, long lost pets, but fuck it! We live now, on a sick, overcrowded, dried up planet!

VIOLETA

Why are you so angry?

COSMINA

Why aren't you? Why isn't everyone?!

VIOLETA

(*pause*) I was never as passionate as you. Despite what happened, I thought you had the purest heart of us all; you always wanted to change the world.

COSMINA

So did you.

VIOLETA

Not with poisoned swastikas; not by killing!

COSMINA

Don't tell me you didn't want to; don't tell me you didn't feel like offing the fuckers!

VIOLETA

Yes, but feeling isn't *doing*! We're women; we're supposed to generate life: to heal and hope.

COSMINA

Beam down, Vi. It's a dog eat dog world. We're all living in militant macho police states. Everyone in power has a prick, and if they don't, they act like they do, so we haven't done much to change things, have we?

VIOLETA

They're better!

COSMINA

Only for some.

VIOLETA

For us! Why can't you forget?

COSMINA

Swastikas won't let me! (*pause*) My last shrink said what happened to great granny in the camps affects me now, and since great granny and I are one and the same, it's got to be worse. Look, I couldn't help it. My gut gave in to some primal howling hatred -- like the dog inside me finally needed to fight back. Grrrrrrr...

(ROZANA enters.)

ROZANA

It's not the dog! Dogs are decent and loyal; you're the other kind of bitch, the kind who violates our primal law. Did you forget? We only deserve more lives if we make the world better; if we treat life as sacred -- *every* life! We've all been victims, but none of us murderers.

COSMINA

At least I touched my targets; looked them in the eyes. This country you've chosen drops bombs from drones.

ROZANA

Drones are for cowardly assassins, but we lived through history; we're supposed to know better.

COSMINA

You dogmatic hypocrite! You do nothing, but I can't! (*pointing*) It's the dead; it's their fault! They made me realize I owed it to myself, my self respect, and to everyone I see and don't see, the ones killed and still being killed just 'cause they're not the same race or religion.

ROZANA

So you think you made things better by killing a few hundred dicks?!

COSMINA

Yeah, maybe. Look, it's easy for you to talk; you don't have to look at pissed off kids who resent me 'cause they never got to live their lives while I've had so many!

VIOLETA

You should have stayed in Romania; this country's made you crazy.

COSMINA

History made me crazy!

VIOLETA

We were doing so well; we were...happy.

COSMINA

Really? I thought only idiots were happy. Just be careful of Dragos: he'll seduce you, make you dependent, then one day you'll wake up all alone 'cause he's left and nailed your ass to the wall like the paintings in his collection.

ROZANA

You're the one he left; he treats us very well.

COSMINA

Trust me, he's a monster.

ROZANA

The only monster here is you!

COSMINA

Screw you!

VIOLETA

(covering her ears) Please, stop arguing!

COSMINA

(pause) So are you a threesome now? Or is he fucking around like the hungry hound he is? You know he screwed that woman from the museum. I could smell the heat on her, and why the hell did he invite her to dinner?

VIOLETA

(to Rozana) Yes, why did he?

ROZANA

Why do you think? There's only four of us left.

VIOLETA

Are you saying he wants to...to make her one of us?

ROZANA

Maybe. Her and the auctioneer.

VIOLETA

Do you know? Did he say so?!

COSMINA

Holy shit...

ROZANA

No, forget it; I could be wrong.

VIOLETA

Is it even possible..."

ROZANA

I said forget it! (*to Cosmina*) You know you're shedding, and you look like shit.

COSMINA

Yeah, I'll try not to piss on the rug, (*barking*) arf, arf!

ROZANA

(*to Violeta*) Make sure she takes a shower!

VIOLETA

Come, Cosmina, I'll show you where to wash up, and I have a dress that should fit.

COSMINA

It better be black! (*growling*) Grrrrrr...

(Music resounds as the THREE WOMEN depart, and TUCKER appears at a future auction, holding a box.)

TUCKER

These vintage compasses are in full working order: all needles pointing with precision to the magnetic north! Some were used for surveying fields of battle from the late eighteen hundreds through the First World War. (*holding a compass*) This beauty was handcrafted in silver and features a watch alongside the compass displaying the "when" as well as the "where" -- which is useful to those of us still tethered to the space-time continuum. So shall we start the bidding at five thousand dollars? Five thousand, five hundred; six thousand, six thousand, five hundred...

(The auction fades as lights reveal the parlor after dinner where ROZANA plays her gypsy guitar and VIOLETA dances. COSMINA and SONIA are drinking brandy with DRAGOMIR who also sniffs cocaine. HE wears a dinner jacket, and the women wear dark dresses. TUCKER has joined them. After ROZANA and VIOLETA cease performing, THEY bow to applause.)

DRAGOMIR

(*to Sonia and Tucker*) May I offer you more cognac? A souvenir acquired during a tour of France prior to the revolution.

SONIA
Yes, thank you.

TUCKER
Oh, please.

COSMINA
Thanks!

(DRAGOMIR pours the cognac.)

DRAGOMIR

(to Sonia) I hope the entertainment and Violeta's gourmet goulash have made your visit worthwhile. I still believe a fine meal among friends is the height of civilized living.
(toasting) To the alchemy of epicurean cuisine!

(THEY raise their glasses, then sip as COSMINA swills her brandy, then pants, her tongue protruding.)

VIOLETA
(whispering) Cosmina, your tongue!

DRAGOMIR
(to Sonia) Excuse her beastly manners.

(COSMINA retracts her tongue.)

DRAGOMIR

(to Tucker) Are you enjoying your accommodations?

TUCKER

For a prison, the furnishings are exquisite. In fact, I sat at the rococo desk writing my final requests in case I don't survive your hospitality. I'll need a witness, so if you'll please sign here.

(TUCKER hands DRAGOMIR a sheet of paper, a plumed pen, and an inkwell from the auction. DRAGOMIR glances at the paper, then signs.)

TUCKER

(to Sonia) Has our host told you about himself and his time-tweaking gypsies?

SONIA
He told me the story of the first Dragomir.

TUCKER
He *is* the first Dragomir.

DRAGOMIR

Ah, so you are no longer a skeptic?

TUCKER

Frankly, I'm having trouble assessing the truth of anything anyone here has said. You all remind me of schizoid aliens from the comics I read as a youngster. But to answer your question: yes, I suspect you're all quite exceptional. Of course, I can't help wondering why you two ladies bid against each other at my auction.

COSMINA

Oh, just us girls having fun.

ROZANA

Cosmina didn't appreciate my ignoring her.

COSMINA

Ha! She freaked; she couldn't believe it was me!

ROZANA

I was hoping it wasn't.

COSMINA

Go to hell!

ROZANA

Will someone get a muzzle?

COSMINA

Grrrrrrruff...

DRAGOMIR

Now, ladies...

VIOLETA

Shush, both of you!

SONIA

(pause, to Dragomir) Please tell me more. Can you vanish and relocate at will?

DRAGOMIR

No, like you, we are mired in linear time, but our perspective is...wider.

ROZANA

And deeper and darker. To you "war" and "genocide" are just words. You watch films that glamorize but diminish the great wars. We know because we've experienced them.

DRAGOMIR

We also witnessed the ravages of starvation and diseases that should be obsolete.

TUCKER

Isn't there a period you enjoyed, that you preferred more than others?

ROZANA

(pause) For me it was after the Second World War during my years at Hunter College when I fell in love with a professor who encouraged me to become an engineer.

VIOLETA

For me, now is the best time.

DRAGOMIR

For me as well, but I was also fond of the years before we replicated, centuries ago when Cosmina and I were happy, before our two sons passed away from consumption.

SONIA

You had children?!

DRAGOMIR

Yes.

COSMINA

Back when Dragos loved me.

DRAGOMIR

Back when Cosmina was innocent, (*to Sonia*) that girl of rare sensitivity.

COSMINA

And dumb as a rock! (*snarling*) Grrrrrr...

TUCKER

What about you, Cosmina? Was there a best time or should I say “a best life”?

COSMINA

No! I’m hoping it hasn’t happened yet.

SONIA

What a pity you can’t travel to the future.

DRAGOMIR

Actually we have -- with the gift of the crystal sphere. A week after we first replicated, Cosmina and I ventured forth. Later we shared our experience with the rest of our clan so often, it became a ritual, a little drama we enacted. Do you remember your parts?

ROZANA

Of course.

VIOLETA

I think so.

COSMINA

Unfortunately.

DRAGOMIR

Violeta, please bring our cloaks. At that time we only spoke a Romani dialect, but for you we will speak English. (*to Tucker and Sonia*) So are you ready?

SONIA

Yes.

TUCKER

I'm on the edge of my seat.

DRAGOMIR

Rozana, please adjust the lights.

(ROZANA dims the lights. As DRAGOMIR continues speaking, HE and COSMINA don long cloaks.)

DRAGOMIR

I slipped on the gloves, held the sphere, then chose the place where I was born, in a caravan camped in the Carpathian forest. Cosmina chose the time, the year...

DRAGOMIR

...two thousand and fifty.

COSMINA

Two thousand and fifty.

(ROZANA flickers the lights as SHE and VIOLETA hum, and smoky shadows surround the players.)

DRAGOMIR

My god, it looks like...

DRAGOMIR

...hell.

COSMINA

Hell...

COSMINA

...must be like this. What is this dust?

DRAGOMIR

Ashes from fires...? Not a single tree standing...

COSMINA

(sniffing) It stinks like burning metal.

DRAGOMIR

(sniffing) And waste water...

COSMINA

Where is our beautiful forest? Is it possible we made a mistake? Instead of the future, could this be the past?

(VIOLETA playing a LEPER WOMAN appears limping, wearing rags.)

DRAGOMIR
My god...

COSMINA
Hello, miss.

DRAGOMIR
Don't touch her!

COSMINA
What's happened here?

DRAGOMIR
(pulling her back) Stand back! She's covered in sores!

COSMINA
(to the woman) Please speak to us; what happened?

LEPER WOMAN / VIOLETA
(whispering) War.

DRAGOMIR
Which countries are fighting? Who is the enemy?

LEPER WOMAN / VIOLETA
(whispering) War.

(The LEAPER WOMAN starts to leave.)

COSMINA
Wait! Please, miss!

DRAGOMIR
(grasping her arm) Cosmina! Get back here!

COSMINA
She's sick; you're a doctor! Do something!

DRAGOMIR
I can't; she's a leper!

(Howls echo as the LEAPER WOMAN turns, shivering.)

COSMINA
What's that? Wolves...?

LEPER WOMAN / VIOLETA
Hunger.

DRAGOMIR

We did not know what the rabies virus was back then. We only knew that being bitten by salivating animals meant certain death, and this beast was a giant, slobbering wolfish hound. Fortunately, Cosmina had enough canine antibodies to survive.

COSMINA

That's when the dead showed up and I thought I'd gone to hell.

VIOLETA

The disease made Cosmina an authentic medium, but also a carrier -- like Typhoid Mary.

COSMINA

Yeah, I'm the kiss of death for everyone but clan members. I can't even sneeze in public which puts a real damper on my social life. (*to Tucker and Sonia*) So what do you think of the future? Cat got your tongues? Ruff, ruff!

SONIA

It's too terrible.

TUCKER

If you really glimpsed the future, then it looks like the violent men of the world are going to win.

DRAGOMIR

Their vanity and barbaric ignorance.

ROZANA

And the war toys they can't resist using. They're going to ruin everything for everyone and soon.

SONIA

But is it possible you only saw the devastation of a local war?

DRAGOMIR

Cosmina and I felt certain we witnessed a meta-extinction in progress, which is why I promised myself: if human beings were going to be rendered extinct, then at least I could salvage the things we once made, the beautiful objects that reflected civilization's superiority, the primacy of imagination. That was when I started collecting.

ROZANA

We swore to dedicate our lives to more benign visions of the future. (*pause*) Everything I build is vulnerable to bombs and erosion, only music provides a sense of continuity, of hope. Since I play the guitar; each lifetime gives me another chance at perfection.

SONIA

(pause) Maybe that future you glimpsed wasn't meant to be seen.

VIOLETA

I agree, and I'm sick of playing the leper, of always reliving the past -- even if it is the future.

TUCKER

(to Dragomir and Cosmina) Well, at least you survived the ordeal.

DRAGOMIR

Ah, but in transit I lost a glove -- the mate to the one you took from the trunk, though I have been wondering why? Why would you want a single glove?

TUCKER

Well, I imagined Monty slipping his gnarly old hand into it, and I guess I...I missed him.

DRAGOMIR

Missed me?

TUCKER

Call me a sentimental sap.

DRAGOMIR

I am touched -- truly. In fact, you should know that in the event of my demise, Doctor Tucker Danes has been named the legal heir to Alchemy Antiques.

TUCKER

Really...? I'm surprised, though it's unlikely I'll be the recipient of your generosity -- given our respective ages.

COSMINA

Unless we teach you how to replicate.

VIOLETA

Cosmina, shush!

ROZANA

Oh, for chrissake...

COSMINA

(to Dragos) Well, isn't that the plan?

DRAGOMIR

Not now, Cosmina! (lifting the decanter) More cognac?

TUCKER	SONIA	COSMINA
Please.	Yes, thank you.	You bet!

DRAGOMIR
(to Sonia) I notice you admiring my snifters.

SONIA
 They're exquisite.

DRAGOMIR
 Austrian crystal, purchased during the reign of Franz Joseph.

TUCKER
 Lord, the treasures you've seen!

DRAGOMIR
 We've all become collectors. I started with the polished skulls of clan members who perished of the plague. Rozana collects popular songs, and Violeta collects dance steps.

VIOLETA
 So Doctor, what do you collect?

TUCKER
 Too much of everything: coveted curios, additions to piles of books and records; boxes of doorstops and knobs. I've got walls filled with clocks that work and clocks that don't; rooms full of medical and musical instruments -- harps, cellos, pianos that are never tuned much less played; and vintage game boards with chessmen, checkers, marbles, (*lifting a small pouch*) which is why I snatched this bag of beauties from your trunk. Old Monty used to visit, so you've seen it all.

DRAGOMIR
 Your home was a hoarder's heaven!

TUCKER
 But hell for my family and the source of many spats that escalated into enmity and ended in divorce. That's the real reason Olivia left me.

DRAGOMIR	VIOLETA	COSMINA
Ahhh, a pity.	I'm very sorry.	Bummer.

COSMINA
(pause) Doesn't anyone want to know what I collect?

TUCKER

What do you collect?

ROZANA

(mumbling) Besides bodies.

COSMINA

(staring at Dragomir) Your love letters. They're in a safe in Miami along with the dog collars of all my pets.

DRAGOMIR

So you see, we are all collectors. Of course, now computers collect yottabytes of everything everywhere, but we are like sponges, soaking up the trends of our times from personal perspectives.

COSMINA

What about you, Tuck? Would you like to join us sponges?

TUCKER

Well, it's certainly tempting.

COSMINA

Sonia...?

DRAGOMIR

Shush, Cosmina! We can discuss this later when our minds are clear.

COSMINA

Why? They look sober enough to me.

DRAGOMIR

Because I said so, and if you insist on pursuing the matter, I will whip you like the defiant bitch you have become!

VIOLETA

Please, Dragos...

COSMINA

(growling) Grrrrrrr...

TUCKER

Aren't you being a little hard on the girl?

DRAGOMIR

Surely you have noticed "the girl" is more dog than the rest of us.

ROZANA

(referring to Cosmina's tapping leg) Will you please sit still?! *(to Tucker and Sonia)*
Sometimes she needs a leash.

VIOLETA

To keep her from chasing squirrels.

ROZANA

And snapping at people on sidewalks!

DRAGOMIR

It was not always like this, there were many months, even years, she seemed in control.

COSMINA

(to Tucker) Don't you love how they talk like I'm not here? They forgot to mention how my scent attracts other dogs who start yapping till I'm hosed down. It's a dog's life, Tuck; over three centuries of feeling I've swallowed the fucking freak, like she's swimming inside my belly. You're a doctor, so can you cut her out of me?

TUCKER

Sorry, I'm afraid my practice is limited to bad colds and bunions. What you need is a specialist.

COSMINA

You mean a shrink 'cause you think I'm batshit, right?

TUCKER

Who am I to judge?

COSMINA

Dragos was the only man I ever wanted inside me, all of him inside me, always and forever, and he forgets that he loved how I lapped his face and licked his belly. *(howling pitifully)* Whuurrrr...

ROZANA

Will you shut the fuck up!

VIOLETA

Please spare us.

DRAGOMIR

(to Cosmina) You are mistaken, my dear. Never think I have forgotten the years of tender kindness and devotion you gave this aching heart.

VIOLETA

It's true, Cosmina, he loves none of us as well. Where are you going?

COSMINA

To the kitchen, I'm famished.

(COSMINA departs for the kitchen, panting.)

ROZANA

You just ate! (*mumbling*) The glutton.

DRAGOMIR

(*pause*) No matter how much you love someone, no matter how much you think you know them, they can change; they can become...

ROZANA

Repulsive! No impulse control, which is why we carry compasses to remind us of our greatest moral imperative: that despite our darkest desires, it is wrong to kill, that killing any human being for any reason contributes to the collective unconscious suffering of all humanity.

(COSMINA enters, nibbling a turkey leg.)

VIOLETA

Cosmina, your manners!

ROZANA

Christ, you're shameless!

COSMINA

Still talking about me?

DRAGOMIR

In case you were wondering, Sonia knows who you are; she knows what you've done.

SONIA

(*To Dragomir*) Some radical Zionists think Cosmina's heroic for trying to rid the world of anti-semitism. On the news they claim she's killed at least two hundred.

COSMINA

"She" is right here and it's closer to three hundred. Swastikas are popular with guys who love to hate, and they're not just anti-semitic, they're anti-gypsies, anti-women, anti-anybody who isn't like them.

DRAGOMIR

(*to Tucker*) Or they are foolish boys who were drunk and made mistakes they later regret.

COSMINA

Why are you staring at Tuck?

DRAGOMIR

Show them your ankle.

(TUCKER lifts his pant cuff, revealing his tattoo.)

TUCKER

(to Dragomir) You're not very discreet, are you? *(pause, to the women)* I'm afraid I was a very lonesome fourteen year old who succumbed to the charms of a racist rube. Only Monty knew about that tattoo because he dug out his needles and turned my swastika into a spider, but I still never see it without feeling remorse.

DRAGOMIR

My obliterating artistry cannot obliterate memories, though many survivors preferred to keep their numbers -- as proof the nightmare was real.

COSMINA

Gee, since we're being so honest, why not fess up and tell Tuck and your girlfriend the truth?

VIOLETA

Oh, no, Cosmina, please...

ROZANA

(to Dragomir) Can't you shut her up?!

COSMINA

(to Sonia and Tucker) Why do you think Dragomir covered up survivors' tattoos? Because he put them there in the first place!

TUCKER

What is she saying...?

SONIA

No, that can't be...

COSMINA

They called him "The Numbers Man." He was captured, deported, and employed by a sadistic major. Go on, Dragos, tell them!

DRAGOMIR

(pause) My specialty was Roma prisoners like myself which meant after the numbers, I added the letter Z for Zigeuner which is German for gypsy. I was still a doctor then, so the major thought blood would not bother me, and since I was given a surgical mask, I was never recognized. *(pause)* Judge me if you wish, but what else could I have done?

SONIA

You could have refused, resisted!

DRAGOMIR

Not with a luger pointed at my heart. At least I insisted on tattooing myself first, (*lifting his sleeve*) but even after replicating, the numbers are visible.

SONIA

Where? I don't see them!

DRAGOMIR

But I do and always will, and trust me, you would have done the same.

SONIA

No, never!

DRAGOMIR

Then you would have been killed.

SONIA

I've seen pictures of your crude handiwork. How do you live with yourself?!

DRAGOMIR

How does anyone? Excuses, justifications, denial. Now I regard my handiwork as a form of identity theft since my tattoos diminished all former documentation. Of course, we are all branded, beginning with birth certificates, followed by social security, credit card and passport numbers -- as if a sequence of digits can truly distinguish one person from another, one genocide from another.

SONIA

You can't seriously compare passports to needles piercing skin?! It's barbaric! To think all these years we believed Dragomir was a compassionate survivor!

DRAGOMIR

Feel free to disillusion them.

SONIA

If I do, you'll be arrested!

DRAGOMIR

It's a little late for that, and who would believe I am who I am? I'm sorry to disappoint you, Sonia, but I never claimed to be heroic. At least I felt compelled to learn the trade and become a competent cover-up man.

SONIA

You think that absolves you?

DRAGOMIR

Would you prefer to have me executed?

ROZANA

At least he never infected or (*to Cosmina*) killed anyone!

COSMINA

Fuck you. I had my own little peace plan.

ROZANA

Spare us.

VIOLETA

No, I want to hear it.

COSMINA

I was hoping my virus would make the bastards into carriers and set off a worldwide epidemic. Then every country would be united in a single cause: to find a vaccine that could only come from me -- my blood! And listen up, Tuck: we'd hold the world's biggest fucking auction with every country bidding with the scrap metal collected from torching their arsenals: their guns, grenades, missiles, mines, warplanes, warships, and war toys of every kind.

ROZANA

You're one sick bitch if you think they'd give up their guns.

SONIA

(*walking to the door*) I'm leaving.

DRAGOMIR

Please don't go!

COSMINA

If you leave, you won't learn how to replicate!

VIOLETA

Don't you want to join our little clan?

SONIA

No thanks.

DRAGOMIR

(*to Violeta*) That's because she's young; she already feels immortal.

ROZANA

Just wait till nobody takes you seriously because you're a shriveled up hag with arthritis, a failing memory, chronic lethargy...

SONIA

All right, that's enough, but I'm still not interested.

TUCKER

Well, hell, I am!

DRAGOMIR

Good. Violeta, will you please open the safe and bring the replicator. Rozana can perform the procedure. (*to Sonia*) You're welcome to stay and observe.

(VIOLETA departs.)

SONIA

Yes, then I will stay.

ROZANA

(*to Tucker*) You'll have to remove your shirt to expose your navel. It takes a few seconds to implant the sensor which resembles a large sapphire that's activated by pressing.

TUCKER

Pressing...?

ROZANA

Years from now when you're ready to replicate, lie supine and press hard on the jewel with your thumb until you feel internal vibrations. Then your body will begin the process.

TUCKER

How long does it take?

ROZANA

It depends on how many organs need replacing and to what degree. If you are fifty, it will take one minute; if you are over 80 it will take three; with your liver, it may take four. Now take off your shirt.

(TUCKER removes his shirt as VIOLETA enters with the replicator which resembles a gold garlic press. SHE gives it to ROZANA.)

DRAGOMIR

If you feel ready, then begin; embed the implant.

(As ROZANA presses the jeweled sensor into Tucker's navel, an electronic hum is heard and TUCKER begins vibrating, then stops.)

DRAGOMIR

Welcome to the clan.

SONIA

Are you all right?

TUCKER

I...I'm just a little whoozy; I need to sit down. (*pause*) My god, that's all there is to it? So now I can just go on with my life...?

DRAGOMIR

Yes.

TUCKER

So you're going to let me leave?

DRAGORMI

Yes, but you know where to find us.

VIOLETA

You're one of us now; we will be like a family.

TUCKER

So Cosmina, is your audience of the deceased still watching?

COSMINA

Yeah, we're their own private reality show. In fact, some of the guys want us to visit the future again, take another peek in the crystal ball.

DRAGOMIR

Did you tell them that's not possible? (*to Tucker and Sonia*) When we returned to our clan, there were cracks in the crystal which shattered into shards. Inside were small blue spheres that I kept in my trunk. (*to Tucker*) In fact, they are in that pouch in your pocket.

TUCKER

The marbles...?

DRAGOMIR

They are not marbles, though I'm uncertain of their function and don't suppose it matters that I no longer possess both gloves. So now I would like them back.

TUCKER

Of course.

(TUCKER gives the pouch to DRAGOMIR who hands the spheres to COSMINA, ROZANA and VIOLETA.)

DRAGOMIR

There's one for each of us.

VIOLETA

How bright and beautiful.

COSMINA

(holding it up to the light) Nice.

ROZANA

(staring at her sphere) It's emanating heat.

COSMINA

(putting the sphere to her ear) And there's a strange humming.

(COSMINA pops the sphere in her mouth and swallows.)

VIOLETA

Cosmina!

TUCKER

Good lord!

ROZANA

Jesus!

DRAGOMIR

Behave yourself!

COSMINA

(opening her palm, revealing the sphere) Just kidding, ha, ha!

ROZANA

Crazy bitch!

COSMINA

It smells like copper, and I feel electric ripples shooting down my throat to my stomach to my *(smiling)* -- whoa! *(pause, recovering)* Oh, shit, now I'm feeling weird...

TUCKER

Give me your hand. Your pulse is irregular.

VIOLETA

(pause, pointing to Cosmina) Oh, god, oh, no, look! Look at her!

COSMINA
What...?!

ROZANA
What's wrong?

TUCKER
Calm yourself, girl.

VIOLETA
Her hands, look at Cosmina's hands!

(Pause as THEY stare at COSMINA'S hands.)

ROZANA
There's a tremor and some spots.

COSMINA
Fuck! You can see my veins!

VIOLETA
Her forehead's furrowing, and her hair's turning...

ROZANA
(to Violeta) So is yours!

DRAGOMIR
(to Rozana) And yours! Quick! Drop the spheres!

(COSMINA, VIOLETA, ROZANA, and DRAGOMIR throw down their spheres.)

ROZANA
Oh, shit, I...I can't see clearly, everything's clouding up.

TUCKER
Look at me: my god, girl, you've got cataracts!

COSMINA
Oh, fuck, my legs are wobbly...

VIOLETA
What did he say? Shit, I'm going deaf!

ROZANA
I'm going blind!

VIOLETA
Oh, god, now my chest hurts.

COSMINA
What's happening to us?

TUCKER
(to Violeta) Sit down; take deep breaths.

VIOLETA
I'm scared...

ROZANA
(to Dragomir) Is this what it's like to grow old?

DRAGOMIR

No! We have to replicate! Replicate now!!!

(Pause as THEY stand, closing their eyes, their hands pressed to their navels, humming in harmony. TUCKER and SONIA stand aside to watch.)

DRAGOMIR, COSMINA, ROZANA, VIOLETA

Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmm...

COSMINA

Fuck! It's not working.

VIOLETA

Oh, god, oh, no...

ROZANA

Nothing, I feel nothing!

COSMINA

(gazing out) They're smiling, the dead are smiling; they know we're coming. *(pointing)* He said I'm turning yellow. *(to Tucker)* Is it true, Tuck? Am I yellow?

TUCKER

Yes, you're jaundiced, *(feeling her forehead)* and feverish.

COSMINA

Shit! *(to the dead)* Stop gloating, you fuckers!

VIOLETA

I'm not ready! I'm not!

SONIA

(to Tucker) I'm calling an ambulance!

DRAGOMIR

No, no, please don't!

TUCKER

Did your gypsy guru ever warn you that this could happen?

DRAGOMIR

Yes, she said something about...

TUCKER

What...?

COSMINA

What!?

VIOLETA

Speak up!

DRAGOMIR

I...I can't seem to remember...

ROZANA

(to Violeta) Oh, shit, he's senile!

DRAGOMIR

No, no, just a lapse.

VIOLETA

My tooth just fell out! (*to Rozana*) How do I look?

ROZANA

I can't see! (*weeping*) I can't see...

COSMINA

Hey, maybe Tuck should euthanize us -- like the dogs we are, ha, ha!

VIOLETA

Shush, for godssake!

SONIA

I feel so helpless...

DRAGOMIR

Cosmina, Rozana, Violeta, stay close. We must stay together. (*to Tucker, his voice rasping*) Don't look so surprised, dying is perfectly normal; everyone does it.

TUCKER

Not like this.

DRAGOMIR

Ha, ha! (*to the women*) Well, my dears, it looks like we've cheated death long enough. (*to Tucker*) Now it's your turn. When you are ready, prepare yourself. Put money aside; find a place, (*grasping Tucker's hand*) but for now please, spare us from becoming objects of an...what? What is the word?!

TUCKER

Inquest...?

DRAGOMIR

Yes, "inquest"! Dead bodies are such a ghastly spectacle; discretion, posthumous respect -- a poetic passing is what we desire. Later you can do what you wish with our bones.

TUCKER

I'll do my best. You know, you're starting to resemble Monty.

SONIA

Dragos, Would you and the others mind if I shared your story?

DRAGOMIR

Fine, but prepare to be ridiculed. Better to tell it in a novel, or better yet a play, a comedy.

VIOLETA

A tragedy!

ROZANA

A farce!

DRAGOMIR

(to Tucker) Promise me you'll move to the city and make Alchemy Antiques a place of beauty and reverence.

TUCKER

Yes, I...I promise.

DRAGOMIR

The back room is big enough to hold auctions -- splendid auctions of priceless treasures.
(pause, rasping) My voice is fading... Where is she? Where is my Cosmina?

COSMINA

I'm right here, Dragos, hold my hand.

DRAGOMIR

(grasping her hand) Oh, my sweet, my darling girl. Surely you know you were the love of my lives?

COSMINA

And you of mine.

DRAGOMIR

Ah, what was that poem? "All lovers young, all lovers must, consign to thee..."

DRAGOMIR
...and come to dust."

COSMINA
And come to dust.

COSMINA

(howling like a dog in pain) Owwwww....

(Gradually DRAGOMIR, VIOLETA and ROZANA join COSMINA'S mournful howls which peak then dwindle.)

COSMINA, DRAGOMIR, VIOLETA, ROZANA
Owwwwwouuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu...

(THEY collapse and expire as lights dim to black.)

EPILOGUE

(A clock ticks and music chimes as the galaxies swirl and time travels to a future auction where TUCKER addresses the audience, his hair darkened, his glasses gone.)

TUCKER

For the last lot of the evening I have a surprise for all you collectors with a passion for human anatomy.

(SONIA enters with a box and retrieves a human skull.)

TUCKER

These splendid skulls date back to the mid-seventeenth century. Composed of twenty-two bones, the human cranium protects the brain which takes its secrets to the grave. But now with the science of genetics and carbon dating, we proved these skulls belonged to the gypsies of Zoltonovia whose afflictions were so accelerated that in a matter of minutes they withered, died and decayed before the eyes of reliable witnesses. This particular skull features extra canine molars, and belonged to a woman named Cosmina who claimed to see the dead and may be among us now. So shall we start the bidding at two thousand dollars? Do I hear two thousand, five hundred? Three thousand? Three thousand, five hundred? Four thousand? Five thousand, six thousand, seven thousand...

(A DOG howls as lights fade to black.)

End of Play

